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[For the religious functions of the dabtara in the Ethiopian church, see category 793.]

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PART VI: HEALING BODY AND SPIRIT

753 177 The "living museum" aspect of Abyssinian culture is perhaps nowhere so evident as in Abyssinian medicine. Both basic concepts and practical functions recall much that has been derived with little change (though much culture loss) from ancient Egypt, the ancient Near East, ancient Greek culture, plus regional ecological developments in Abyssinia itself.

753 756 Many ailments are regarded by the Amhara as closely interwoven in the body and spirit of the patient, and in fact, frequently no sharp distinction is made between bodily and spiritual ailments; so that the same illness may sometimes be treated by the surgeon-herbologist ("wogesha"), and if not successfully cured, by the practitioner of exorcising magic, the "däbtära" scribe; or the practitioner of sympathetic magic, of the "zar" cult; or even the sorcerer, the "tänquay". Only the latter is considered illegal. However, a fairly clear distinction is made between organic ailments and functional ailments, and on the basis of whichever preliminary diagnosis is made, it is decided which practitioner to call in first.

756 The association of the däbtära with the church has increased his activities in recent years from that of amulet-writer and herbologist to many of the functions of outright magic, particularly since the tanqway has become illegal. The dabtara always seems to have enjoyed the highest respectability and trust of any of the practitioners, for, as in ancient Greece, his activity in the official religion is believed to extend over the ills of the body and over the world of the spirits.

753 There is no philosophical basis for the development of medical systems among the Amhara, no reasoned system. Their medical concepts are pre-Galen, at most Aristotelian. The dabtara have, or, in some cases claim

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756 to have, books handed down from past centuries, containing secret formulae, recipes, pharmacopeia of an intermingled empirical and magical nature. They warn inquirers that the public revelation of th these secrets would create great social dangers at the hands of the irresponsible.

171 In the days of ancient Egypt, Abyssinia was a supplier of materials for embalming, such as incense, myrrh, etc. It is therefore little wonder that much of Abyssinian medicine resembles that of ancient Egypt, e.g. the strong emphasis on purgatives used regularly.

753 The Amhara shares with peasants in many other parts of the world his belief in "strong" medicine, powerful in taste or heroic in effect or both. Since the Italian invasion, his belief in injections, which bring such miraculously quick results, has assumed magical proportions. Generally he distrusts and fears new medicines.

1. Healing the Body

A. The Surgeon-Herbologist-Empiricist ("woggesha"): Utilizing Nature.

759 Unlike the other medical practioners mentioned earlier, the woggesha does not try to dominate nature; he specializes in utilising what nature provides and in lending a helping hand. He is most often the first consulted, a kind of general practitioner, family doctor; and since he refrains from magical undertakings, he is neither feared nor suspected of witchcraft, which the other practioners, even the dabtara, often are.

Like the dabtara, the woggesha is often an expert herbologist, called "agabi zeray" (lit. who knows the work of nature). While walking in the bush, along brooks in the valley or in the "daga"

000 The patient would recover anyway in due course.

758 The therapeutic value of convalescense ("ʾärrəm alä") is recognized, and patients are told to bask in the sunshine.

562 Men are more likely to let themselves be treated by the "woggesha";
756 women, who suffer more frequently from functional ailments, approach
757 the "dabtara" or "zar" doctor more often and request magical aid.

844 When birth approaches, the midwife is called, almost never the woggesha. If he is, he may not touch the genital parts of the woman, and merely advises the midwife. When labor pains begin, the patient is given a drink of mashed linseed to "relax the birth tract" and to "lessen the pain". The newborn baby is annointed with butter (often rancid), and fed some of it.

759 Other medical helpers, apprentices, or modern "dressers" may be referred to as "healers" ("fəwash"), "bala mädanit" (lit. medicine man, who knows empirical drugs and cures), "caretaker" ("astabaqi"), male nurse ("nəgsit"), modern "dresser" ("astamami"). None of these are respected professions, for they are regarded as too close to manual labor, and such practitioners usually go to other provinces where their work will not shame the family. In recent years, the more skilled ones have been coming from Eritrea.

178 Modern change has been largely indirect and partial. The new
757 laws still permit the "woggesha" to function. Penicillin and other antibiotics can be purchased without a prescription at the big "Saturday markets", for as little as ETh$2.50 (US$1.-), and the patient simply buys it, takes it to a "dresser" in the nearest town, whom he pays 1/2 dollar Ethiopian (US 20 cents), to give the injection. When symptoms disappear, e.g. in syphilis, he believes himself cured.

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178 This attitude is of course deplored by the Western physicians who know
757 of it. But modern medical treatment is still little available outside
the major towns. Patients come to hospitals often only as a last
resort, fearing to be separated from kinfolk and exposed to treatment
by strangers, so that mortality in hospitals is high, which reinforces
[743] the fears. At present there are probably no more than 50 hospitals in
all Ethiopia, and only a few hundred Western physicians. Both are
heavily concentrated in Addis Ababa, so that the field of the "woggesha"
has not shrunk at all.

164 B. Common Ailments and their Treatment.
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●756 The more common ailments and procedures followed by the "woggesha"
755 and "dabtära", (practitioners who occasionally overlap in specialties
but almost never in treatment), include the following (see next page):

753 An important part of diagnosis is the decision whether an ailment is contagious ("fera") or not, and whether it is inherited, congenital ("quranna") or not. If inherited, marriages with such families are despised as not "attentam" (good stock), the same term used for descent from slaves or other "race" or both.

759 In general, the woggesha is most often called in organic ailments;
757 shares with the "dabtara" the practice of functional ailments; while the latter shares with the "zar" doctor the treatment of mental ailments.

2. Healing the Spirit

X 794 A. The "Zar" cult of supernatural spirits, its institution and cosmology.

755 One of the most complex developments of Amhara non-material culture, to which a great deal of mental ingenuity is devoted, is the healing of mental ailments. But this goes far beyond treatment and cure. The "zar" doctors do not limit themselves to treating some of the aforementioned mental ailments. They organise the afflicted, before, during and after "cure", into "zar" societies, which bear the earmarks of a religious cult, and to which the individual belongs henceforth until his or her (more often her) death. Here he finds the warm companionship of the fellow-afflicted; opportunity for expressive behavior; the religious feeling of having been of service; the personal attentio- - a personal possessive and protective spirit; and the visible leadership of the "zar" doctor who heads the organizational unit.

X 794 The zar doctor often a matriarch, differs only in degree from
● 756 her flock; for she, too, must be possessed, must be forever afflicted by spirits. But she has managed to learn to control them, call upon her more powerful protective spirits to aid her against evil spirits,

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X794 more tricky but less powerful than bars. This enables her to relieve
756 the sufferings of her clients; without, however, curing them. For a possessive spirit can be turned into an asset - into a protective spirit once the spirit's demands are known and regularly fulfilled. Why should anyone wish to reject such a protective spirit who helps solve the problems of life and even "beautifies the face" with an inner glow? Only a few hopelessly evil demons, mostly female, need to be exorcised.

X794 Women, otherwise limited in cultural participation among the Amhara,
562 particularly in the church institution where their expressive behavior and opportunity for service are almost entirely rejected, constitute a considerable majority in the zar societies, even in the top leadership; so that many men think of the zar cult as predominantly feminine, and consult zar doctors by stealth only, at night. Men have ambivalent feelings about their wives attendance: they are often jealous of the "possessive" spirit; object to the financial outlays demanded by the "zar" spirit on pain of "relapse" into the patient's catatonic, schizoid or hysterical state; object to their wives being at the doctor's hut all night during worship-sessions; but admit that their wives are thereafter easier to live with, indeed more beautiful when the "wəbi" (inspiration) "is on their face".

[182] Thus the "zar" institution affects many other Amhara institutions: Marriage and the Family; Religion; Economics; Ethnic Relations; and even linguistics.

X794 The psychological attitude in Amhara culture which emphasizes the
755 aspect of possession in love, and in other intense human relations, has
[832] already been pointed out in connection with "love magic", which attempts, instead of arousing love in the partner, to render him or her submissive.

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X 794 Every zar has an individual name and personality. Thus, one of
776 the first tasks of the "zar doctor" is to diagnose. This is done in a
753 variety of complex procedures: "Playing along" with the spirit's desires expressed through the mouth of the actions of the possessed; or, in case of intermittent possession, a cult session during which the "zar" is lured to re-possess and re-inhabit the body of the patient, in public, where the zar doctor can observe every phase of the sequence of possession, and thus, on the basis of long experience, detect the peculiarities of the particular "zar" spirits. Once identified, gradual and limited "control" of the particular spirit can then be established, and a "modus vivendi" created.

a) <u>The "Zar" doctor: patients: procedures of healing: basic "zar" personalities.</u>

X 794 The work of the "zar" doctor consists of three parts: identifying
755 the spirit who "rides" the patient "like a monkey" (the same metaphor used by drug addicts in Western countries, e.g. in the movie "Man with the Golden Arm"); after this diagnosis follows the "cultivation", negotiation, establishment of friendly relations with the spirit (treatment); finally the establishment of life-long protective cult relationships (prognosis; socio-mental hygiene).

X 794 The boundary line between the chronic "zar" patient and the "zar"
756 doctor is regarded as a thin one. Both are referred to as "bala zar" (lit. mastered by the zar). Both are equally "possessed", by one or several spirits, but the healer has turned his weakness into a profession, by learning more and more about the various spirits; the types of patients; how to achieve some control over the situation instead of being controlled by it or even destroyed by it. The doctor

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must have a talent for this work, and learn it through long apprenticeship, while serving an experienced "zar" doctor as monitor in the cult. In time, a "zar" doctor will identify his own personality more and more with the most powerful of the spirits that possess him, or the one that possesses him most habitually, and will even derive his professional name from that individual "zar", e.g. "balā qolē" (lit. possessed by the non-dancing household-protective "zar" named "qolē"; hence - Doctor Qolē).

Much as in other skilled occupations among the Amhara, the "zar" doctor is regarded as particularly capable if he has inherited his profession, preferably from his mother. After apprenticeship, the new doctor receives his power by contagion, i.e. from his mother or older zar doctor who place the hands on the head of the graduate. In many cases this enables the "monkey" to slide from the teacher to the "zar" graduate, especially if the teacher is the mother, so that the new doctor can start out with a protective spirit of high calibre. Zar doctors lacking this inheritance sometimes claim that they have derived their extraordinary powers from having been kidnapped by a zar in early childhood (which zar spirits are fond of doing for the pleasure that looking at a "visible" child is said to give them); and having retained the power and privilege of communicating with his erstwhile foster-parent even after his release. This claim is more often made by male zar doctors than by female ones, for the latter usually inherit the profession from their mothers.

A zar doctor, especially a male one, is regarded as particularly arrogant in personality. When walking on a trail, he walks in great strides. His hair stands up stiff like that of a warrior, or, if his

X794 "zar" is a Muslim, is covered with a flaming-colored turban. Unlike
●756 other Amhara men, he wears an ear-ring, of bright metal, in one ear. He seems absent-minded, distracted inward-looking, greets no one. However, when greeted, he may reply with a tirade, in "zar" language. Sometimes he claims to have just returned from a magical voyage, e.g. to have just visited the home country of a visiting foreigner, so that he knows all about it.

X794 Male zar doctors often develop a sharp, staring or shrewd
756 Mephistophelian look, so that their effect on a patient who generally
755 fears the evil eye is almost hypnotic even when the doctor is not in a trance. As a result, even stubborn patients in the grip of a new hysteria stop their shrieking when startled by the appearance of such a figure in the hut. Without saying a word, the doctor grasps the upper arm of the patient (for male "zars" attack the shoulders first, squatting on the back of the patient like a baby on the mother's back). When the patient, usually a woman, has been sufficiently subdued by the stare, the doctor loosens his grip and lightly begins to caress the upper arm and shoulder. This shows that he is unafraid to make contact with the spirit and that the situation is well in hand.

X794 A male zar doctor had, in the recent past, a place of honor at the
756 table of feudal chiefs who often consulted them - perhaps more because of the doctors' knowledge of humans and public opinion than because of their spirit world. Even today, the social status and income of a zar doctor in rural areas and provincial towns is high, and he can afford such expensive European attire and apparel as a folding umbrella, laced shoes, a ring of silver or gold, etc. He may break rules of politeness, even utter mild insults and commit familiarities without

X 794 repression and penalty, for no layman can know whether or not it is
● 756 the spirit who speaks through the doctor in any given situation.

X 794 The most frequent types of mental afflictions which the "zar"
164 doctor is called upon to treat are forms of hysteria (mostly in women), catatonic states (also mostly in women), and violent forms of possession including epileptic states (mostly in men). But he also treats some functional ailments, notably rheumatism, which is believed to have been caused by a "lazy zar" who wants his "horse" to stay in one place.

X 794 Though every person is considered a potential "horse" for a zar,
776 certain personality types are considered particularly vulnerable to
753 possession by evil zars: persons with sad, returing, melancholic natures; women who feel unloved and neglected by their husbands and thus offer little resistance to a male "zar lover"; persons who wish to escape, e.g. chronic drunkards.

X 794 Apathy, leading to catatonic states if not treated, indicates
753 incipient possession by an evil zar. The patient, often a woman,
758 withdraws into a corner, sits there huddled up, refuses to accept food. Until a zar doctor can be persuaded to come and take on the case, family and friends try to give the patient first aid. For, if she were to remain long in this state, it is believed that her "zar" could "ride" her to death. Therefore, relatives and neighbors come quickly, sing to the patient, entertain her, promise her whatever her heart desires, and generally try to create a merry atmosphere. Finally they try to lure the patient into watching them dance, and try to raise the patient playfully, so as to join them. The patient is never left alone until the doctor comes.

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794 776 755 [825] specialize in "drinking" magically the milk of the lioness or female elephant, etc. When zars appear in dreams, cats and jackals often represent female zars, snakes male zars. But the animals are merely forms which the zars assume temporarily, while the zar spirits themselves retain their demanding-protective identity permanently.

[756] Some zar doctors are considered far more experienced, clever, or specialized than others, so that stubborn cases are referred to them. One of the most stubborn is the zar of epilepsie, called "barya" (lit. Barya tribesman, hence, slave). This zar is believed to have his home in the Nilotic lowlands below the northwest escarpment, a desert and near-desert area inhabited by the Barya people. There this zar is believed in contact with "ganyen" (djinn), from whom he has acquired his evil character. Prognosis in this case is more limited, and all the zar doctor can do is to negotiate an agreement with "barya" to afflict the patient less frequently. Even the diagnosis is difficult, for the patient often has to be restrained, even tied up, and special herbs and procedures are required.

Another difficult case is the patient possessed by several different zars at the same time, which confuses the diagnosis. In this case, the cleverness, experience and diplomacy of the diagnostician are severly taxed, to unravel the tangle, and treat each zar without insulting and neglecting any of the others. The usual procedure is to appease the most powerful one, e.g. "awolye", first, and enlist him as guardian spirit against the others. A really powerful and arrogant zar doctor can go so far as to attempt to treat the personalities of the minor zars themselves. Thus he may give them a severe talking to

X794 776 From this complex array of the plaguing - but often also protective- spirit world, it becomes clear that there is a great deal of significance in the zar cult beyond mere healing of mental ailments; even beyond the organizing of patients into groups of devotees - a kind of group therapy with religious overtones. There is an extension of the acquired "protection" so that some zars become not only protective spirits of individuals, but patron saints of certain social groups in Amhara society, e.g. some specialize in the rich and noble, some in the poor or low-class; some in hunters and warriors; etc. But although religious affiliations are usually identified sharply, there is considerable crossing of the lines in the spirit world so that Coptic Christian spirits may have Muslim names, and even practice religious intermarriage. Another important contribution made by the [812] zar cult is that it orders nature, explains nature to the Amhara mind, yet allows enough flexibility (e.g. in regional variations, and the continuously increasing and decreasing power of individual zars) to admit new information, new revelations, to be fitted into the traditional construct. For example, in the 1930's the dominant zar spirit in Gondar was Säyfu Čhängär (ascertained by a French expedition); in 1953/1954 it was Aweliya. Since zar spirits can have successful and unsuccessful careers, so can humans; hence, new ideas, even modern ones, can be fitted into the spiritual world.

But the major character of the "zar" complex is that of a healing cult.

X794 ●756 776 c. <u>The Annual Convention ("amat bal") of the "Zar" Doctors; Voluntary Possession in the "Zar" Cult.</u>

On the 23rd night of the month of Yäkatit, the day before the beginning of the Coptic Christian lent, the "zar" doctors of Gondar hold

X 794 their annual convention,("amat bal", lit. the annual event). This is
● 756 about the time when the rest of the Christian world celebrates its
796 mardi Gras, Carnevale, Fasching. The timing of the convention is probably no accident, for there be_ as, the day after the noisy Convention, the period of "kudadē" (lit. suffering) in the life of Christ, priests would hardly permit the noisy and gay celebration during lent.

The convention takes place in Addis Aläm (lit. new world), the oldest section of Gondar town, once restricted to Muslims and other non-Copts.

Unlike Western Conventions of doctors and scientists, the zar Convention does not consist of calm, objective, sometimes monotonous and even icy presentations. Instead, in the convention of "zar" doctors new techniques are subjectively demonstrated on participant zar devotees who are chronically possessed; diagnostic aids are utilized in actual treatment of actual patients; new poetry to cajole specific spirits is recited in ecstatic chants to the beat of the drum, while the audience joins in with refrain-chanting and rythmic handclapping. It is a super - "wädäja" (lit. love-feast) of the zar cult, bigger and better than ordinary zar cult activities, and introducing new experience, but in principle follows the same basic procedures of luring protective zars into public "possession" of the afflicted, and enlisting them in the diagnosis and treatment of ailments caused by evil or mischievous zar spirits.

X 794
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796 In view of the esoteric elements in the zar cult, it is little wonder that the "amat bal" is restricted to zar doctors and permanent devotees. Therefore it was not easy for a "European" observer like the

X794 present author to be permitted to attend this all-night session.
● 756 Careful negotiations through a trusted intermediary person had to be
123 arranged ahead of time. For at any time the chief of the zar doctors
796 could end the negotiations on the ground that some of the "zar" spirits would be offended or repelled, and refuse to come into full possession of their "horses" in the presence of a stranger. An additional antagonistic element was fear of the local police detectives, who, though they do not interfere with the zar cult, have orders from the self-concious central government not to let foreigners witness it.

X794 The chief zar doctor of Gondar in the present generation is the
756 Lady (woyzäro?) Sälämtew. She is renowned even outside the entire province (Begemdir-Semyen), as far as Tigre province and even in Addis Ababa. This is perhaps more due to her position than her own initiative, for Gondar has long been considered the city of powerful spirits and traditions. She leaves most healing activities to her disciple "balä zar", except for very stubborn cases. More often she is busy as "consultant", for many clients, even non-devotees of the zar cult, bring their family or business or litigation problems to her. She herself is possessed by several powerful, protective male zars, to whom she ascribes her various powers, from whom she receives inspiration, the spirit of enterprise, courage to experiment in perfect comfort and security without the fear of the evil eye which hampers other individuals engaging in anything new.

She is not afraid of the pinpricks of medium and minor "zar" spirits, for her whole like is devoted to the service of the most powerful ones. One of the latter has strong Coptic Christian affiliations and learning, and guides her in her cautious and unofficial

X794 relations with the priests of the Abyssinian Coptic church; e.g. by
@756 whispering to her when to give them private feasts, and how to guide observant Amhara clients - married couples in domestic strife - so as not to come into conflict with the "mänfas gubaë" (lit. soul father, confessor, who would normally arbitrate such a case for the church).

Another of her powerful zars teaches her medicine, and specializes in the diagnosis of difficult cases of possession. Still another is a specialist on what the other zars prefer as sacrifices, taboos, poetry, and how to negotiate with each of them; (i.e. he teaches her how to function like a priestess).

Another of her zars specializes in business advice: when to buy and sell what; when and how to invest in caravans, or invest in construction of town houses. Occasionally she also takes incidental advice from low-status spirits such as Shanqit, who gives her minor hints on how to be a good hostess when entertaining a "telleq säw" (great man) who comes to her in secret; and on how to manage her large household.

Lady Sälämtu's posture, when not undergoing possession herself, is one of benign self-assurance, not unlike the calm, almost phlegmatic composure of Amhara nobles who act as if everything must come to them. For Lady Salamtew appears sincere and certain of being able to draw on her private reservoir of protective zar spirits almost any night she chooses.

X794 The writer's negotiations with her were conducted through his
756 guide, himself a native of the Addis Aläm section of Gondar, and who,
123 though young, occupied some status as "educated" (seven grades of modern
115 elementary school). Moreover, he was not unknown to Lady Salamtew, for his father, a well-known "wogäsha" doctor in Gondar, had often referred

patients to her when his organic medicines had not helped. It was this guide who hit on the idea of flattering Lady Salämtew by notifying her that the foreigner was sick, suffering from severe headaches, sleeplessness and chronic intestinal cramps - (all common ailments in her practice), and that he would trust only her for treatment. Whether or not Lady Salamtew believed this, it indicated to her that the foreigner would fit himself into the framework and procedures of her zar cult, and not become a disturbing element that might "offend" her zar spirits.

The guide had taken the further precaution of negotiating with her through her brothers, who were willing to encourage her to accept, in the hope of gifts and rewards. As a result, Lady Salamtew accepted in principle; but in line with the unhurried dignity of her position she had the foreigner informed that he should send the guide again at a later time when she would make known the conditions under which he might attend the "amat bal" convention. In appreciation for having reached this point in the negotiation, the guide left her brothers with some "ṭan gänzäb" (money for frankincense).

The next step was reached when Lady Salamtu expressed the wish to have the foreigner appear before her, some days before the convention, so that she could look him over.

Her house, a semimodern affair of hard-mud walls, is reached by a steep downhill trail from the Gondar town market. On the lower level (the old section of Gondar called "Addis Alam") many houses and huts are built on the foundations of stone houses destroyed by the dervishes in the late 19th century. This section, once restricted to Muslim and ~~mix~~ other non-Coptic minorities, is now largely inhabited by Muslim Ethiopian weavers and retail traders, many ex-slaves of Sudanese or part-Shanqalla

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descent, and a few poor Amhara Coptic families, as well as some Amhara who do business there, such as the "wogasha" doctor. Various elements which do not wish to be under too close scrutiny by the church or the police prefer to live in this section. Here the "zar" societies can pound their drums as loudly as the cult requires, for only muffled sounds will rise to the Coptic part of the town.

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After stooping to pass through the somewhat low entrance to the house of Lady Salamtew, the visitor finds himself in a room larger than he had anticipated. He is told to remove his shoes, (as if this were a church or mosque). The room is lit by numerous little clay oil lamps even in daytime - a considerable luxury, - for windows have been carefully avoided or boarded up to assure privacy. On the mud-benches around the wall sit a number of women; others sit on mats on the hard-mud floor. An Amhara male visitor in European type suit, who has just consulted the Lady Salamtu, leaves hurriedly. Lady Salamtu is seated on a raised platform at the far end of the room, behind a curtain, and another area in front of her stage is marked off by a long, thin wooden beam embedded in the floor. The women devotees in the room are busily spinning cotton with their little distaffs, and, since it is still afternoon and not yet "zar time", whisper and gossip with each other freely. Some take time out to suckle their babies, often without rising.

Someone has gone behind the curtain and whispered to her that the foreigner and his guide have arrived. She promptly pulls the curtain aside, but pretends to pay no special attention to the visitor. Her active zars have not possessed her at this time, and she therefore appears absent-minded. She sits on a slightly raised seat on the small

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platform, her legs crossed almost Turkish fashion, very unlike the usual Amhara posture. She is in her late forties, a rather stocky, powerful woman. Her features are heavy, and she seems at least half-Sudanese. She reinforces the non-Amhara, alien aspects of her appearance by wearing large, yellow, metal bracelets and anklets, and a Muslim-type deep red print cloth over her hair and shoulders. The dirt floor of her platform is covered with sheepskins. Whoever rises is careful not to turn her back to Lady Salamtu. Whenever she moves, there is an attentive hush in the whisperings. In the far corner the smoke of incense rises slightly and blends with the light smoke of the oil lamps.

The only males in the room are the two brothers of Lady Salamtu, and it is with them that the guide begins his whispered negotiations. The visit is brief. Before leaving, the guide advises the foreigner to leave Lady Salamtew some "frankincense money." The foreigner understands that he is to give it to her directly - which is a faux pas - and crosses over the separating beam to place the money in her hand. Only after several days does he learn that this was a breach of protocol, for by touching her hand he might have removed one of her valuable zars "by contagion".

Some days later the negotiators make known their conditions for permitting the foreigner to witness the "amat bal" annual convention. He is to send: three dollars worth of imported incense including frankincense, sandalwood, also sesame seeds; one dollar's worth of coffee beans; a small amount of gunpowder which is pleasing to one of her zars; one bottle of "areqi" (arrak) distilled liquor. The foreigner is forbidden to take any written notes (which a foreign missionary had one done) on the grounds that this is displeasing to the zar. He is warned

X 794 not to cross the boundary in front of the stage again. He is not to
796 approach the house until well after nightfall, and is to come by a
123 back trail, so as not to be seen by passersby.

X 794 Thus, after nightfall on the 23rd of the month of Yäkatit, he
796 climbed over eroded back trails down to the "Kokit" section of Addis
123 Alëm and approached the house of Lady Sälämtu where her devotees were assembled. It was 7:30 P.M. More oil lamps had been lit. There were about 20 women, but a male zar doctor with talents in poetry and chanting sat near the stage, wearing a white turban much like a Coptic Abyssinian priest. A powerful male drummer had been hired for the occasion.

X 794 Lady Sälämtew still took no official notice of the foreigner, for
796 her zar had not yet "descended", and without that she was just a hollow
[123] shell, a mute "horse". One of her brothers motioned the foreigner politely to a seat on the mudbench that ringed the wall. There was much subdued whispering, as if a momentous event was about to take place. The hairdo of several of the women devotees and doctors had
[302] been specially arranged to honor their individual zars: those not permitted to cut their hair had plaited it into a braid ("zuroch") surrounding the skull; others had shaved a circle in the middle (called "gucho"), like a little girl.

X 794 Other preparations and paraphenalia included the ritual coffee
796 trays ("gända"), which symbolized the wooden"tabot" (sacred tablet)
778 of the holy Coptic city of Aksum, and which were dedicated to several zars including Säyfu Čhängär and Rahëlo. The ancient mother of many zars, named "Werär" was believed to have stolen the original "tabot"

from Aksum (just as Menelik I is regarded by the Coptic Abyssinians to have brought it to Aksum from Solomon's Holy of Holies at the temple in Jerusalem). But the tabot of the zars also symbolized the outdoor tree stump which serves the invisible zar spirits as a table. Thus, partaking of refreshments from the coffee trays constituted a kind of communion with the zar spirit to whom the tray was dedicated, although this was done only during intermissions of the cult services. On one tablet, the "araqi" supplied by the foreigner stood ready.

In the corners, more types of incense were burning than before. In addition to "etan" (frankincense), the domestic Ethiopian "bukbuka" was sending up clouds of perfumed smoke. Leaves of "wogart", believed pleasing to the zar that causes headaches and neuralgic pains, were occasionally placed on the clay incense burners. From time to time, some imported pebbles of yellow sulphur ("kabrē" or "din") sent up acrid smoke. But the sweet odor of most types of incense predominated most of the time.

About 8:30, the drummer brought his heavy drum down from beneath the solidly built roof, and began to drum slowly, rythmically, still subdued. The curtain was lowered, but the shadow of Lady Salamtew behind it could still be vaguely seen. Suddenly raucous grunts began to be heard from behind the curtain, emanating from Woyzäro Sälämtew. This meant that her first major zar had arrived, and was beginning to descend into her, performing the magical coitus. Her joyshouts became louder, higher-pitched, turning to shrieks, quicker and quicker. She was beginning to perform the "gurri" victory dance of the zar who had conquered her.

Immediately the women devotees began to handclap rythmically, gradually quickening their tempo, in time to the twisting and turning

of Lady Salamtew's body. The twisting began like an embrace, with her head thrown back, rotating movements of the chest, followed by a rythmic forward bump of belly and hips. Her ecstatic shrieks varied from pain to exultation (like the "allel" of women in the Coptic church service). Encouraging shouts came from individual women in the audience, and some raised their holiday - reddened palms in prayerful joy. As the climax approached, the jerky twisting of Lady Salamtew's body gradually changed to smoother movements of the limbs. She was now well in tune with her zar, and he was comfortable within her. The excitement in the audience changed to warm and glowing emotion at the same time. Then Lady Salamtew emitted a loud scream, and dropped in a heap. The drum stopped abruptly. There was a sudden hush in the audience. The strong sweet odor of generously burned incense pervaded the consciousness and its smoke leisurely curled upward.

It was only a matter of minutes before Lady Salamtew recovered. Her brother pulled the curtain to one side. Her eyes were bright with curiosity as she glanced about the house as if she had just arrived. She had lost her absent-minded appearance, for now the zar acted and spoke through her. Suddenly she appeared to notice the foreigner for the first time, smiled and waved a friendly greeting. Her voice was still husky, but warm, as she called out "how are you" in understandable Amharic, rather than her esoteric "zar language"; this was a courtesy, though she used the female familiar gender (the zar often uses the inverted genders in address). She further inquired whether the foreigner was sitting in comfort, and how his health was today (hinting at the "ailments" he had used as a pretext). Then she ordered the handmaidens to offer the foreigner talla (barley beer), and coffee, on one of the zar coffee trays.

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X 794 She then proceeded to greet the individual zar doctors and devotees
● 156 as if she had been absent a long time. Each rose and bowed deeply to
796 her. Barley beer was now passed around freely, while coffee beans were being roasted and crushed, in preparation for the next intermission.

X 794 Refreshed and heartened, the male zar doctor serving as poet now
782 began to chant the hymns he had composed in honor of "aweliya" the
796 chief male zar of Lady Salamtew. The rytha was as formal as the hymns
[533] chanted by the dabtara in the Coptic Abyssinian church, but contained Arabic loanwords borrowed from the traders' vernacular. The audience quickly learned the response and accompanied the responsive chant with rythmic handclapping:

Poet: "Salaam" (lit. "Peace", greeting; similar in Geez and Arabic languages).

Crowd: "Salaam Alēkum" (lit."Peace be with you", in Arabic).

Poet (continuing in Amharic): "Enter, warrior; enter warrior! "

Crowd: (repeats the same words).

Poet: "Lord Aweliya, what have I given to him (polite address) that he may be merciful to me?"

Crowd: (repeats same chant in more wailing pitch).

Poet: "Flower (synonym for youth), oh zar, flower!"

Crowd: (repeats)

Poet: He is Lord of Sera, Lord of Mora is he". (Polite address).

Crowd: (repeats).

Poet: "He, bridegroom Zar! Bridegroom Zar!"

Crowd: "Bridegroom Zar! Bridegroom Zar!"

Poet: "Like a lion, like a leopard, when he roars!"

Crowd: (repeats).

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some fancied item without payment, as a sort of silent commission.

Some zar doctors are very exacting with their regular patient-devotees, and therefore, by local standards, are quite rich. They invest in real estate such as semi-modern shacks of the "street of single girls". Many female zar doctors and some of the clever devotees own the profitable mead houses ("tāj bēt") described before. On the other hand, a great zar doctor is expected to show generosity and distribute part of the income to followers and assistant zar doctors, just as feudal Amhara chiefs distribute loot to their retainers, and as great zar spirits offer commensal rights to the little zars.

Because of the greed of the zar spirits, a kind of evil eye in itself, many "possess" hide their property from the zar doctor as well as the zar spirits. It is believed that their demands are never satisfied, that the more they are given the more they want, in "mäqwädäsha" (lit. that which makes to love) gifts. Some zar spirits possessing a poor person are regarded as always on the lookout for "contagion" with a rich person, for, by putting a "touch" on him they can change "residence". Zar doctors competing with each other sometimes lure a zar away from another doctor on purpose, so that they can advertise, through the grapevine of the possessed, that a great protective zar has changed residence, thus increasing the fame and income of the ambitious zar doctor. It is well known that in times of scarcity there are few new "possessions" by the zar, while in times of abundance there are many.

A poor person, who is struck, usually by a low-status "poor man's zar", and approaches a zar doctor for treatment of his ailment, is treated but must work off the "gifts" in service, through labor. A poor man will act as a servant, run errands, weave reed baskets, etc.

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X794 A poor woman will perform work such as serving coffee, sweeping,
●756 fetching water and fuel, cooking, baking, brewing beer, and spinning
556 cotton thread in the house of the zar doctor.

X794 The contract arranged by the zar doctor with the zar spirit for
675 each patient devotee is regarded as having legal validity. In exchange
776 for regular gifts and services the zar spirit promises limited reposs-
session, at regular intervals only, and self-restraint in contagion of
other members of the family of the patient at least until after her
death. After that event the zar spirit may pass on to the next
generation to assure himself continuation of the preferred gifts.

X794 Complications are explained away on the grounds that there has been
776 some trifling oversight in payment of dues or in respect; or on the
grounds that another, evil, zar has "stolen" the dues in order to make
trouble. The zar doctor never admits to error; instead, he restores
the contract by instructing the possessed to dance the "gurri" of
atonement ("yäbaṭer gurri") (lit. of the stick) if guilty; or the
"yämshrat gurri", dance of mercy and acquittal, in case of slight
[691] oversight. Some zars are as fond of litigation as most Amhara. One
zar spirit is nicknamed "wäs aggach" because he always requires a
personal guarantor, "wäs", whom he will "possess" in place of the
patient in case of default in payments.

X794 Even the judicial authorities, the provincial judges among the
694 Amhara, will occasionally recognize zar possession as a valid excuse
for violations of the law, or at least as a mitigating circumstance.
Failure to appear in court to answer a summons may be forgiven on
the grounds of "agorra" (lit. he roared, shrieked, i.e. is under
possession) that particular day. The only other equally strong excuse
would be that the person summoned had just taken kosso purgative.

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578 In the new courts established by the central government in
699 the provincial towns, the term "kayla" is regarded as an insult and can be prosecuted legally. The proper, legal term is "seratanna" (lit. workman).

326 How can one explain this strong syndrome: ironsmith - buda -
754 Falasha, which still dominates the Amhara mind? It is interesting
563 that silversmiths are less feared than ironsmiths, are more respected and (perhaps in psychological consequence) are regarded as less hateful and vengeful; (they are also less feared for they work indoors, where they can "see" less). Furthermore, although Falashas in their own society are not ashamed of their ironsmith trade, the Amhara project their own despising of this manual craft onto the Falashas and believe that Falasha ironsmiths, ashamed to be seen working at such lowly work, "fasten" on passersby with their buda eyes.

Perhaps at the basis of this syndrome lies the idea that a skilled craft, existing within the technologically primitive Amhara society, must be the result of association with evil forces
[[71]] of the supernatural. This has been the pattern regarding ironsmiths in parts of the Middle East, Africa and ancient Europe. Amont the Amhara Copts of Abyssinia, the idea that these ironsmiths are also "deniers of Jesus Christ", yet have an "education" of their own, above the "pagans" makes them doubly dangerous. Added to this is a projection of their own pattern of fears and hates.

a. <u>"Buda" doctors past and present</u>

756 While the aforementioned dabtara is the most commonly
793 called doctor of buda disease, sometimes, especially in urban areas, the Coptic priest himself is called in.

158 Sometimes cases of buda possession are brought in to the
[159] government hospital at Gondar where two European physicians are in charge. They have diagnosed the shrieking, wildly beating type of case as "hysteria"; and the apathetic type of buda case as "catalepsy". In the latter case they have observed absence of reflex responses on eye and knee, almost no pulse, faint heart-beat, low blood pressure; sometimes a stupor in which the patient has no control over bowel movements and urinating. In severe cases of this kind there is a suspension of sensation and will, and muscles are so rigid that limbs keep any position they are placed in by the doctor.

755 In one memorable case, a hysteria patient, a man, had been gradually quieted by a Coptic Amhara priest called in by the European doctors at the hospital, who knew the effectiveness of this from past experience. All the priest had done was to hold the hand of the patient and quietly recite prayers in the Geez language, (which the lay patient could not understand). When the priest tired of this, the regular hospital priest was called in to continue this "treatment". But at sunrise the next morning the patient had disappeared out the window. The hospital "dressers" (male, semi-trained nurses) explained that the patient probably would go a long distance from this area, to escape the severe beating his kinfolk would give him - the "post-operative" treatment meted out to patients recovering from buda possession to "discourage the buda from returning".

755 In the rural areas the "tänqway" is still sometimes called
● 756 in to treat buda cases, though this is not his major specialty. He is what has been called a "witch-doctor", professional sorcerer, and diviner. He usually treats the patient by frightening the

buda out of him: seating the patient in ashes - the natural abode of the buda - to entice the evil spirit to leave through the anus. The latter is regarded as the preferred pathway of the buda - the opposite principle of the soul which is believed to leave through the head. Sometimes the tanqway orders that the person accused of buda sorcery be brought before him and made to spit upon the patient, which breaks the spell if he has actually cast it. Since 1942 the government has branded the "tänqway" as a fraud. As a result, the business of the still respectable däbtära and also the woggesha has increased in treating cases of buda.

C. Evil-Spirit Disease ("ganyän") and the diviner ("täñqway")

While the aforementioned täñqway is, or used to be, called in occasionally to exorcise a buda, his major specialties are the exorcising of "ganyän" evil spirits who have a very different character, and the divining of lost or stolen goods.

Of all spirit doctors, the täñqway occupies the lowest social position. He is "uneducated" for he uses no books and in fact is almost always illiterate. His methods are nearly identical with those of African "witch-doctors" and include such methods as throwing of bones and animal parts, for divining.

The major principle of both the täñqway diviner and the ganyän spirits he specialized in, seem to be regional; the activity one of geographical orientation. For the ganyän, considered inferior to zar and buda spirits in power, are localized, evil genies. The term itself is etymologically related to the Arabic "djinn", local evil genies, though actually derived from the Geez "janyen"), and the concept is also similar: most ganyen are either water-spirits or fire-spirits.

manslaughter of an average citizen, killed e.g. in an automobile accident, or by a trigger-happy policeman, at "semanya" on its present monetary level.

Other types of ganyen disease are forms of epilepsy, "haut mal", referred to by the Amhara as "ganyën yasï" (lit. the ganyen has seized him; plural is "aganent". In this case, a dabtara is often called in and tries to exorcise the evil spirit with magic formulae; sometimes the woggesha doctor tries to intoxicate the patient with a paste of "assärkush täbbätäbkush" (Cissus adenautha), which drug finally lets him have some rest. In contrast, the method of the täñqway is literally a bag of tricks.

In his role as magician, the täñqway is called "qumña" (from "qäma", he stood up), for he tries to identify the personality of the evil spirit from his abode; e.g. in the water of a brook, or a waterhole in the river, or under a certain tree, etc. The magician is also considered an expert on fire and lightning. When a person is struck by lightning, "mäbräq" (lit. Thunder), the priests consider it heavenly punishment and in the past even refused to bury the victim in the churchyard; thus the täñqway is called in. His treatment consists of moving the victim quickly to the fireplace - for he regards fire and warm ashes as the counteracting principle. If a house is on fire in town, it is still believed that the magician, standing on the roof of a neighboring house with a mirror, can prevent the spreading of the fire by causing the flames to recoil.

Cases of drowning are his specialty also. This too is considered by the church a heavenly punishment for hidden crimes, for the victim is regarded as having been surrendered to the "demons";

755 and the worst and most numerous ganyen are regarded as water spirits,
756 e.g. at the Blue Nile and everywhere also during the long rainy
789 season.
[776]

After diagnosing the identity and origin of the specific
755 ganyen, the täṇqway tries to exorcise the demon by treating him
776 with contempt (exactly opposite to treatment given the "zar"). Instead of feeding the spirit a succulent "mäqwädäsha" (= love gift), the ganyen - possessed person is fed a lunch of ashes. For a ganyen that is a fire-spirit, is attracted by ashes, his element, and may thus be induced to leave the body of the patient in order to feast. The täṇqway follows this method even in cases of buda as indicated before.

The next step in treatment consists of "fixing" the ganyen somewhere else, so that he will not return into the body of the victim. This is done by the scapegoat technique; e.g. by fixing the demon into the body of a chicken, killing it, throwing the carcass away where the hyenas will eat it; or transferring the water-spirit to another locality.

756 Besides his role as a healer of ganyen, the major activity
[787] of the täṇqway is as diviner of lost or stolen goods. It is not polite to use the term "täṇqway" in his presence, instead he is politely addressed as "awuqi" (lit. knower, wise man). Since he usually makes it his business to know what goes on among professional thieves, his insight into such matters is sometimes indeed considerable; but also contributes to his bad social reputation. In "diag-
[694] nosing" the case, the tanqway acts as detective, studies the place of the crime, investigates neighbors and finally draws seashells (zagol Lebsu") and bones from his bag and throws them, to read additional information from their direction and mutual position.

●756 His clientele in this role consists largely of women, who often come to him with petty problems, whom he can charge little for his services, but who provide him with a regular, though modest, income. A täntqway, unlike zar doctor or dabtara, never becomes rich. Also, both peasant women and townswomen go to him to have their personal fortunes told. He sympathizes with them in their marital quarrels, encourages them to be disobedient to their husbands and to bring him money and gifts withheld from the husband. Consequently, men consider the täntqway a wrecker of marriage, and so does the church. The proverb says:

[539] "Lying täntqway,
the house he destroys".

Men do consult him on the occasion of stolen property, but are ashamed to be seen going to his house. They go secretly.

There is a significant element of competition between the täntqway and the däbtära, though the latter is considered far superior, "educated", and is now actually driving the täntqway out of much of his business.

In the popular Amhara mind, the täntqway is regarded as fearful of the däbtära. For the latter can undo the success of the former through magic formulae written in Geez, copies from secret Geez books. With such a formula, the däbtära can go to the river, call the gänyen water-spirits and instruct them to steal the "bag of tricks" of the täntqway, or to refuse to come when called by the täntqway. The dabtara disdains to use the bag of tricks, regarded as primitive and when he captures it will destroy it. Conversely, if a dabtara has "charmed" a thief by giving him a specially written amulet against capture by the police, nothing the tanqway can do

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756 will trace the thief or the stolen goods. Also, the active intercession for a better future, which the dabtara can achieve to some extent by appealing to saints and angels whose secret names he knows from his books in Geez, is considered far superior to the mere fortune-telling of the täñqway.

D. The Scribe (däbtära) as Healer

795 a. Summing up the position of the däbtära

756 In many ways the social position and activities of the dabtara symbolise the syncretic character of Amhara culture. His official function is that of semi-lay staff of the Coptic Abyssinian church. He serves as scribe, chorister, translator from Geez to Amharic; the church could not do without him. His official rewards are meager, mostly a parceling out of what the priests receive. Thus his major income comes from his unofficial, extracurricular activities as healer. The copyist of church works logically becomes the writer of amulets. This brings him in touch with the cosmology of supernatural spirits, some of which are considered in the realm of zar, buda, ganyën and with doctors ranging from the empiricist woggesha to the exorciser-sorcerer täñqway. It may seem surprising that there is not more competition between these specialist. The fact is that the däbtära, enjoying the greatest respectability among healers because of his association with the church, can afford to be and is generous to all except the täñqway, and in fact enjoys his position as uncrowned king of healers. He is the only healer, apart from the empiricist-surgeon "woggesha", to whose house men clients and patients walk publicly in broad daylight without fearing loss of prestige.

795 His social status compares to that of a "great man" (telleq säw),
756 but much of this is due to the fear in which he is held, because of his power over the supernatural world, in Amhara belief. There is fear that if someone were to offend him, he might use his powers to do evil - though black magic is not his usual metier. (The "love magic" of the däbtära has been described in relation to sex).

[539] "of insects, the worst is the scorpion;
of man, the worst is the däbtära".

[574] For the dabtara are unabashed in inviting themselves to feasts, weddings and any distribution of goods (e.g. parceling out of meat as soon as an ox has been slaughtered). In fact, they often act as if the host owed them an apology for not having sent an official invitation. Therefore, dabtara are usually invited to family feasts even if they are not kin.

795 The däbtära learns his craft through apprenticeship, beginning
756 when in the upper grades of church school. To achieve this, he
874 must be "ättäntäm" (of unmixed Amhara or Tigre stock), have a good chanting voice and musical ear, be good in school, and find a däbtära-teacher willing to impart his knowledge to him. At this stage in church school he begins to be permitted to learn to write; and is not punished for doodling - forbidden at lower grades for fear a student might stumble on a formula and misuse a powerful spell.

795 There is even one priestly function which the däbtära occasionally
756 carries out. That is "re-baptism". He may re-baptize a patient vic-
[183] timized by ganyän, sometimes also cases of buda, as part of exorcism.

795 Some dabtära have grown wealthy through mass-production of
756 amulets, in which they leave the name of the client free, to be
552 filled in on the market when sold. But this "waters down" his reputation.

b. The cosmology of demons treated by amulets

789 The amulets written by the dabtara are worn, usually on the "matab" neckcord, or around the waist especially of women. They are not read. To be effective they must bear the inscribed name of the wearer, though it is possible to have a dabtara erase the name and substitute another. Usually the amulet is written on varying qualities of parchment (from very thick to very fine), rolled tightly into a small leather case. The ink used is usually [384] made of soot, charcoal, iron powder and gallus. To emphasize an important name or matter, imported red ink is used.

Amulets also may contain drawn pictures, symbols and geometric design, some of a type that has been called "cabalistic". A fre- [716] quent picture is the scene depicting the killing of the female demon of miscarriage, "Werzelya", by Saint Susneos, seated on a horse using a lance (much like European scenes of St. George killing the dragon). This demon is sometimes depicted as a female [567] of the negroid (Barya) tribe, from which the Amhara used to capture slaves. The legend that accompanies this scene is as follows:

773 A Christian martyr, named Susneyos, had married and his child
789 had been killed by the female demon Werzelya. Thereupon he prayed to Jesus and received special power to slay themurderess. St. Susneyos mounted his horse, took his spear and rode away to the desert (evidently the Nilotic lowland below the northwestern escarpment), where the demon was hiding with others of her kind.

177 [776] contained in the aforementioned book "Lefafa Tsedeq".

African cosmology underlies much of this syncretism. Some is probably old-Cushitic, antedating the Geez-speakers. Some evidently has been carried into Ethiopia by the Galla. Caravan routes and the slave trade have long maintained contact with Central Africa, and some amulets resemble the "grisgris" of West Africa. [126]

• 756 [177] The däbtära thus has many tools and sources for his trade. He can use the books of the church, in Geez which he alone understands; saints, angels and martyrs; translated Arabic myths - including many of Graeco-Christian origin; cabalistic Hebrew cosmology; he can call on the mystical elements of nature: fire, water, earth, and air, without knowing that ancient system.

No wonder that some däbtära specialize and work out syncretic systems of their own. The more esoteric the source and the manner and atmosphere of writing, the more admiration and faith does it call forth. Some dabtara secretly cooperate with zar doctor colleagues. Some develop rituals of their own, such as writing amulets only on specified days of the week. Some go so far in their syncretism as to invite (secretly of course) a non-Copt, such as a Muslim or a Falasha, to write certain texts for him, on the amulets; or the interfaith colleagues exchange their handiwork! For the efficacy of the esoteric is regarded as double. Amulet-writers of the three faiths are curious about each other's magical powers, and while the ordinary individual will shun and fear such "comparative religion", the doctors feel protected sufficiently to risk such "free enterprise" contact.

126. See Lifschyz: Amulettes Ethiopiennes. Minotaur, Vol. 2, 1934, p. 71-73

1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5

Foreign observers, citing early European parallels, have often wondered whether the Christian Church of Abyssinia has replaced the pre-Christian spirits with angels and saints, denoting the pre-Christian spirits to demons. Except for the "ganyen" - where this attempt is still far from successful - only one foreign scholar has traced such a replacement, in Abyssinia. While studying the celebrations of the Birth of the Holy Virgin in Abyssinia, he noticed certain features which led him to think that his holiday is used to obliterate an old "pagan" cult of outdoor spirits. [127]

Thus the predominant factor is still one of syncretism.

E. The Characteristic Significance of Amhara Healing of the Spirit.

The Abyssinian practitioner of magic is first and predominantly a healer (with the minor exception of the despised täqway sorcerer). He is a healer of individual patients, rather than of society.

Thus the social significance is at most secondary. The only exception, the "zar society", is primarily "group therapy". There is only tangential contact with political, legal, administrative institutions and their function. This is very different from the "society of sorcerers" among the Bemba of Northeast Rhodesia, who hold the people in terror and exercise political power. [128]

While the "zar societies" are female-dominated in quantity of members and in leadership, males are by no means excluded. They therefore differ considerably from the "female witches society" among the Nupe of Northern Nigeria. [129]

The only close parallel between Amhara concepts of magic and other African concepts of magic is between the "buda" complex of the

127. Tubiana, J: Un Culte des Génies Agreste en Ethiopia". Rassegna di Studi Etiopici, Vol. XIII, pp. 76-90. December 1954
128. Richards, A.I.: A Modern Movement of Witchfinders. Africa, Vol. 8, No. 4, 1935
129. Nadel, S.F.: Witchcraft and Anti-Witchcraft in Nupe Society. ibid

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

hazardous. Moisture and chill lower the resistance of man and beast to respiratory infections. The weekly fasting schedule is resumed, and the more devout observe the thirty-day fast of the Disciples. In August, finally, the sixteen-day fast in honor of the Assumption of Mary is observed by everyone older than six or seven years.

On the thirteenth day of that fast occurs the strange holiday of Buhē. Before and during this day, which is marked by the baking of special *dābo* for the shepherds, the countryside crackles with the reports of shepherds' whips. In this season when the humid air lends an explosive sound, the shepherds crack their whips for fun; but older boys and men join in great whipping battles on Buhē,* in which two teams lash each other until the members of one can stand it no more. On the evenings of Buhē, small bonfires are lit all over the countryside, and more *dābo* is eaten and whips cracked.[5] A few days later the fast of the Assumption is over. Young and old look forward to the end of the rains and the festivities that commence with the new year.

These are the days and years of the Amhara peasant. Some other aspects of his life that come to the fore when more analytic perspectives are applied will be discussed in later chapters. But this calendar of activities forms the immediately observable setting for the "inner world" of the Amhara peasantry: those ideas, sentiments, and values which constitute its outlook on life.

THE WORLD OF MEANING

The Natural Universe

The Amhara peasant is not familiar with most of the cosmological notions found in the Great Tradition of Abyssinian culture, as transmitted through books like *Qalamsis* and *Aksimareos* and the oral traditions of learned churchmen. It is unusual for him to have a precise image of the layers of water, fire, and air beneath the earth, and it is still less likely for him to be familiar with the complicated hierarchy of invisible worlds, watery skies, and seven "real" heavens which are enumerated in the Abyssinian cosmology. He believes that stars influence human affairs, but leaves the possession of astrological knowledge to the *dabtarā*. The presence of cultural specialists who know about such matters has relieved him of the burden of dealing with ideas about the cosmos, ideas which are more widely diffused in more homogeneous societies.

The peasant's working conception of the cosmos is thus a very simplified version of that of his Great Tradition, together with certain pagan notions. Like his more learned countrymen, he divides the universe into two main parts: the world, *alam*, consisting of the earth, sun, moon, and stars; and

* This custom is now extinct in many Amhara areas.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

world. Some are purely descriptive, like the notion that *budā* turn into hyenas after dark or ride hyenas like horses, or the belief that when red spots appear on the side of a clay pot when it is heated over a fire it means that the *ṭayb* who made the pot are fighting each other. Others guide him in warding off the evil ones, such as the idea that evil spirits can be kept away when a female child has been born by placing something of iron at the head of the mother's bed. But for serious trouble—when someone has been afflicted by a *zār* or infected by a *budā*—the folk wisdom does not suffice, and a specialist is sought.

The *ṭanquāy*, or "sorcerer," is consulted for exorcising demons as well as for physical ailments. In treating a *zār* patient his task is to discern, by clever interrogation, what manner of *zār* is riding the patient and then to determine what sort of gift is required to propitiate this *zār*. For a patient who has been "eaten" by the evil eye, he may succeed in summoning the guilty *budā*—identified when the patient calls out his name during a trance—and inducing him to spit on his victim; or he may resort to such techniques as transferring the demon from the victim to the body of a chicken and then killing the chicken. The *ṭanquāy* has other supernatural powers. He can summon the devil to liquidate the enemy of a client. He can interpret dreams and predict the future. For this he boils coffee, burns incense, and, sitting on a white sheepskin with freshly cut grass spread about the room, speaks out whatever comes to him.

The *dabtarā*, thanks to his knowledge of books and the lore acquired sub rosa while attending the church schools, wields many more powers than does the *ṭanquāy*. He can write amulets to keep away sickness and evil spirits. He knows formulas that can protect one from bullets and instill insatiable passion in the breast of one's beloved. He has the power to bring rain or make it stop, and to plague the householder by turning all of his possessions against him. Like the *ṭanquāy*, his expert knowledge of plants and herbs can heal the sick or poison the client's enemy. His superiority over the *ṭanquāy* is shown by the different manner in which he arranges a divination: he consults his heavy books, brews and interprets leaves, and then writes out his predictions on paper. For all this the *dabtarā*'s fees are usually higher, but his status is perhaps more precarious, for he is after all a man of the church. The peasant feels none too easy in dealing with one who both serves the church and deals with devils.

Time and Space[7]

Devils, *zār*, evil eye, and sorcery are hidden in the crevices of Amhara mentality. They are spoken of, if at all, somewhat fearfully, and some Amhara pretend that such things no longer exist or are of little account in their culture. The sacred spirits, on the other hand, loom large in the public mind.

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garded as more important than human effort in attaining one's goals. "If a man works hard, he may remain poor. If he does not work hard, he may become wealthy. The outcome is due to fate." The peasant is discouraged from determined efforts to make changes in his environment because of the feeling that no matter what he does, God's disposition is what really counts.

In addition to feeling that innovation is ineffectual, the Amhara peasant tends to feel that it is immoral. Reverence for fathers and forefathers is, we observed, a key element of the Amhara ethos. This patriarchal sentiment informs the Amhara's defense not only of his land and his religion, but of the procedures of daily living as well. It is not good to deviate from the familiar ways of doing things because they, too, have been handed down by "our fathers"; this is a phrase which interlards Amharic conversation.

A number of other, more specific, norms have had the effect of discouraging inventiveness among the Amhara. Experimentation with matter was inhibited by the disdain for puttering about with one's hands—doing anything, that is, similar to the activities of the socially dejected artisans and slaves. Hence the peasant retains the same rudimentary tools for wresting a subsistence from nature that he has used for millennia, and searches about the woods for a properly shaped piece of wood rather than improve his art of carpentry.[16] Experimentation with ideas was inhibited by the anti-intellectual cast of Amhara culture, which discredits the pursuit of ideas for their own sake. Ideas pertain either to the unchangeable mysteries, as expressed in the religious literature, or to the unchanging verities of human experience, as expressed in folk proverbs. Ideas are not entertained as "adventure," to use Whitehead's term—as a source of novel possibilities in life, a guide rather than a justification of custom.

Two factors are especially significant in accounting for the Amhara peasant's reluctance to use ideas drawn from experience and insight for the purpose of reshaping custom. One is the fact that the primary medium for the elaboration and dissemination of such ideas—the written word—was affected by a number of restrictions in Amhara culture.[17]* As a consequence, although writing has been known in Abyssinia for two millennia, it had almost never

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* The act of writing was considered to be inherently shameful: like any manual activity other than farming and fighting, writing was regarded as degrading work, the business of scribes whose status was thereby not much higher than that of potters and manumitths. Only a small percentage of the clergy learned to write, and those who did were rarely adept at it. The products of writing, moreover, were deemed either too sacred or too nefarious to warrant giving laymen easy access to their medium. Script belonged above all else to the realm of scripture. The awe felt for holy writ was a deterrent against using that medium for other than devotional purposes. The chief private use of writing was for the magic formulas of the *debtara*, another connection with the supernatural that discouraged its lay practice. The *debtara*'s art served injurious as well as beneficent purposes, and the fear that those who learned to write might stumble onto potent phrases was reason for restricting that skill to a small group of the initiated.

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[For information on psychotherapists, see category 116, pp. xvi, 23, 27-30, 73-79, 87-99, 115-118, 139-142, 162, 174-179, 187-195, 198-236, and 240-241.]

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[For additional materials on medical practitioners, see category 759.]